

particularly in the rate of loss for dermatitis, malaria, and respiratory disorders. Had it been possible to retain the women in Australia until they were fully equipped for field conditions, as had been possible in England, the educated guess was that the rate in excess of men's losses might have been lowered.

Morale

There was every indication that the women's morale had held up excellently at most stations. All observers agreed that, as in Italy, the one factor which had done most to sustain morale was the nearness to actual combat. Units in the most forward areas were consistently found to have the highest morale. The race to get forward had become a matter of competition, and WAC officers reported that the panacea for supply shortages and primitive living conditions consisted in "excitement and pride in being the first Wacs."¹³¹ A typical group upon disbandment wrote sentimentally of the Leyte experiences—tents, candles, no supply, mud, foxholes, air alerts, rain—and added, with no apparent sense of incongruity, "We'll never have a detachment so ideal and so perfect again."¹³²

Even when Wacs were not actually near the combat area, the constant presence of combat-wounded and released prisoners gave a sense of immediacy to their efforts. Wherever possible—as for example at the 51st General Hospital—women were allowed to visit hospital wards. They saved their beer and cigarette rations, cookies from home, and flowers grown around their tents to share with the patients, with resulting good effect not only on the wounded, but on the women themselves.¹³³

Units everywhere had adopted mon-

keys, dogs, chickens; smuggled a duck on shipboard; cherished unidentifiable native animals. Songs were invented for all subjects ("If you meet a looie with big blue eyes, you can look but you can't fraternize").¹³⁴ The women took pride in improvising: a Christmas tree was made of native thatch tied to a bamboo trunk, decorated with scrap metal from enemy planes. When most Christmas packages failed to get through, inspectors noted that "they opened the few that came and shared them like sisters," while one supply sergeant filled their shoes with "gifts" of pistol belts and towels. Desiring a green-and-gold WAC guidon for the funeral of a member of the FEASC WAC detachment, the women improvised one from parachute lining, dyed with atabrine and green ink.¹³⁵

By comparison with problems of morale among noncombat men, the Wacs' good morale appeared even more striking, for women seldom complained about, or were depressed by, factors that were high on the men's list—mail service, rotation, officers' superior privileges, and the lack of good movies and other entertainment. The only common complaint factor was that of food. Particularly noteworthy was the mildness of WAC complaints about their company officers' deficiencies as compared to the complaints by noncombat men about their officers.¹³⁶

¹³¹ AFPAC Reply, both versions. See also Hist Rpts. Folder, 5225th WAC Det, Drawer X-28368.

¹³² Correspondence folder, 5205th WAC Det, Drawer X-29853.

¹³³ Hist Rpts, Jan, Feb 45. Folder II, WAC Det FEASC.

¹³⁴ Interv with Lt Mary B. Warner, 3 Oct 47.

¹³⁵ (1) Folder I, WAC Det FEAF, Drawer X-25096. (2) Hist Rpts, Jan, Feb 45. Folder II, WAC Det FEASC. (3) Quotation in Folder, 5225th WAC Det, Drawer X-28368.

¹³⁶ For typical noncombat male complaints, see History of South Pacific Base Command by Hist Sec, G-2, Hq SOPACBACOM. OCMH.